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THE  
STATE OF THE TRADE

OBSERVATIONS ON

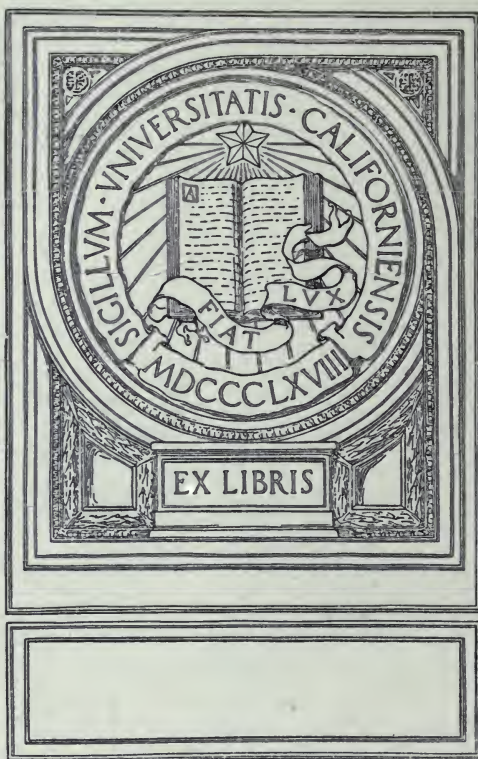
*Eight Hours and Higher Prices,*

SUGGESTED BY RECENT CONFERENCES BETWEEN THE NEW YORK TYPOGRAPHICAL  
UNION AND THE EMPLOYING BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS OF THAT CITY.

BY  
THEO. L. DE VINNE.

NEW-YORK :  
FRANCIS HART AND COMPANY, 12 & 14 COLLEGE PLACE.  
1872.

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## THE STATE OF THE TRADE.

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ON the 11th June, 1872, the New York Typographical Union made an application to the employing book and job printers of this city for a conference as to the expediency of establishing eight hours as a day's work (at the rate of \$20 per week of forty-eight hours) and an advance of twenty per cent. on the present prices of piece-work.\*

This application was made in strict conformity with the agreement made between employers and employed in April, 1869, by which each party bound itself to confer with the other concerning all matters of disagreement, and in case of irreconcilable difference, to give thirty days' notice of any determined change of prices or rules. The spirit of this application was as courteous as its form was equitable.

At a meeting of employing printers, held at the Astor House, June 18, Mr. William C. Martin in the chair, it was decided that a committee of seven employers should be appointed to confer with the committee of seven that had already been appointed by the Union.

The first meeting of the joint committees was held at the Astor House on June 21st. The reasons assigned by the committee of the Union were substantially these :

1. Eight hours is the law of the land, so declared by this State and by the United States.
2. A shortening of the hours of labor is needed to check over-production. Men will be better employed.
3. It is needed to benefit the workman. He needs more time for social and domestic enjoyment and intellectual culture.
4. Reduced hours of labor are in accord with the spirit of the times. It is the fashion in other trades and should be in this.



5. Improvements in machinery have so increased production that long hours are not needed. One can now do, with modern appliances, more in eight hours than he could have done years ago in ten hours. The extra two hours is a useless drudgery.

To these propositions it may be replied :

1. The law is fully applicable only in the civil service of the State. It was so understood by the legislators. It defines hours where there is no usage or agreement, but it does not define wages. It cannot; for legislation like this is beyond the powers of the State. If the State enacted twelve hours as a day's work, no day-workman would feel obliged to give away two hours more of time. As the law now reads, it cannot be pretended that it is the duty of the employer to give the value of two hours to his workman.

The law is not fully obeyed by the executive officers of the State or the Nation. Even if it were, the usage of the State is too partial and too unfair to be quoted as a precedent. Unlike any individual employer, the State is not controlled by questions of profit or loss, nor limited by the action of competitors. In this, as in other matters, it acts independently, for it is irresponsible.

2. There is no over-production in printing, as will hereafter be more clearly set forth. The real grief of the unemployed labor in typography is, that it does not produce all that is sold. Too much of the printed work that is sold or used in the city is manufactured outside its limits. This evil will be augmented by shortening the hours of labor.

It is a mistake to assume that many pieces of printing that are now done in eight weeks will have to be done in ten weeks; that short time will insure more and steadier work to all classes of workmen. A greater delay in doing work is contrary to the spirit of the age and the habits of business men. It will not be tolerated. No employer can enforce such a delay on his customer. To shorten the hours of work is to compel the employer to buy more machines, to occupy more room, to keep more men, and especially boys, in employ. It will bring more in the trade, but it will not



increase their chances of steadier employment. On the contrary, it will ultimately make their chances more precarious.

3. The alleged benefit to the mechanic is doubtful. There are instances in which the decrease of hours of labor would be of great advantage to the workman and his family ; there are others where it would be injurious. But this personal phase of the question should not be considered. The use or abuse of the mechanic's leisure time may be a fit theme for the moralist or legislator ; on the part of the employer, its discussion is considered, and not unreasonably, as an impertinence. The workman is not accountable to the employer for his unemployed time.

The result of short hours of labor on society is another matter which may be noticed with propriety. There is a mischievous doctrine that we work too much—a doctrine of exceeding comfort to thousands of idlers, but it is one that must be rejected by every candid observer. All the advantages of civilization that we enjoy have been chiefly earned by long and hard work ; they are upheld by work, and would soon be forfeited if we should materially diminish our performance. The condition of the mechanic in New England and the mechanic in Mexico is a fit illustration of the advantages of long and short hours of labor. The New England mechanic, who works the longer hours, best knows how to use his leisure—has more of the comforts of life, is better paid, is better educated, is more of a man every way. It is his superiority, physically and mentally, that gives tone to society and strength to the state. The Mexican mechanic, who has less work to do and who works less, has most leisure, but he is poorer, is ignorant, has less opportunity for acquiring wealth, and less protection to life, liberty, or property.

4. The proposition that a reduction in the hours of labor is in accord with the spirit of the times, is not entirely correct. The inferences commonly made from this proposition are illogical. It is true, that within seventy years the hours of labor have been reduced from fourteen to twelve, and from twelve to ten. In this country they were reduced slowly, almost without organized action on the part of the mechanic, in obedience to natural laws, and without injury

to any interest. Does it follow that we must now reduce to eight? If so, why not to six, or to one?

The prime agent in this reduction of the hours of labor has been the use of steam and machinery instead of muscle. They have increased production to such an extent, that shortened hours of labor were really needed to restore the balance. But has there been, within the last ten or twenty years, any really great labor-saving invention equal to the steam-engine? Has new machinery been invented that to a great extent has made new uses for labor?

There never was greater need for work than there is to-day. There never was a time when men were more judged by their work. There is no greater stigma, short of criminality, than that of idler or loafer. It is the fashion to work. There is no eminent man in any deserving position who has attained his success but through work—and work not of eight, but of ten and more hours a day. It is a sad mistake for any mechanic to assume that he always works longer hours than others. There are, it is true, subordinate positions in which the work of the day has to be finished every day. When it occupies six hours a day, the mechanic is envious; but he forgets that there are many days when the same man has to work sixteen hours a day, and without extra pay.

In all regular trades ten hours is the rule. It is the basis of all prices. The stubborn resistance made by employers of every class to the change to eight hours is not unreasonable. It is a sudden alteration in a measure of value that disturbs all prices and upsets all estimates. It is not a reform; it is a revolution. To the mechanic it is a dangerous experiment. He cannot now foresee the possible or probable complications in which the adoption of shorter hours will entangle him. There is a house in this city that has declared eight hours as insufficient for the amount of business it does daily. When menaced with the enforcement of the eight-hour system, it proposed to shorten the day to six hours, and to employ two sets of mechanics. This is but one of many ways by which shortened hours would be of great damage to the workmen. They would ultimately get less wages, and make themselves more competitors.

A sudden shortening of the hours of labor, with its corresponding advance in prices, can be of no real and lasting benefit to the journeymen. If the compositor on time, in 1862, had been told that, in 1872, he would be in the steady receipt of \$20 per week, he would probably have expressed his content with the advance. But he is not now content. Neither he, nor any of us, could then foresee to what an extent the purchasing capacity of money would be diminished. A similar future result will surely follow a similar present advance. If this advance could be confined to printing, it might be a benefit to the printer. But it cannot be so confined. Other men, other trades, in self-defence, will advance their rates. If the production of the country is decreased one-fifth, and its prices are appreciated one-fourth, an increase in wages, so far from being a benefit, is a real injury. With wages at \$25 or \$30, the same dissatisfaction would exist, and for the same reasons.

5. It is true that, by the aid of machinery in some departments, the mechanic of 1872 can do more work in eight hours than he could have done in ten hours in 1830. It does not follow that the employer of the machinery receives the same prices or makes the same profit. The facts are the reverse, as will be shown hereafter. The workman receives his share of advantages from machinery. In the press-room of a printing office he has steadier work, better pay, less drudgery, less responsibility. In the composing-room of a printing office there have been no great improvements, and, consequently, no reduction of expenses to employers. It has been asserted that as much work might be expected in a day of eight hours as had been done in ten hours. This is obviously in flat contradiction to the request for an advance of twenty per cent. on piece rates.

With employing printers this question of eight hours and higher prices is not so much a question of expediency as of ability. To shorten hours and to advance piece rates is to increase the cost of work. Who will pay this increased cost?

There are compositors (not many) who believe that the employer should pay it out of existing profits. There are



others who think that it could be secured, with more or less of exertion, from the buyer of printed matter. Employers, without exception, are of opinion that they cannot pay it out of present profits, and that it cannot be had from the buyer. The opposition made is not factious. Assure any employer that he can secure this advance, and although he doubts its ultimate advantage to any interest, he will accede to the request for eight hours. It is only because he sees difficulties that he hesitates or declines. The question that seems so easy of solution to the compositor—nothing but the asking and getting of more money from the buyer on the one hand, and the paying out of a corresponding sum on the other hand—is to the book and job printer a problem beset with difficulties. To ask the money is not, necessarily, to get it. To ask it, and insist on it, may be to lose what one already has. The employing printer cannot coerce his customer, who has the power to take his work to rivals either in or out of the city. The nature, the extent and the causes of this rivalry among offices are seldom properly considered. It is necessary, as a preliminary, to recite some of these facts.

The typographic printing of New York may be divided into five distinct classes :

1. Printers and publishers of newspapers or periodicals.
2. Compositors of newspapers.
3. Printers and publishers of books.
4. Book printers or stereotypers.
5. Job printers.

There is no one office in this city that pretends to do the work of all these classes. There are offices that do book, job and card printing ; but in most offices the separation as above stated is sharply defined. For its successful prosecution, each class requires a special kind and separate organization of labor, a special provision of types and presses, and a special education or apprenticeship on the part of the managers or proprietors. Compositors may, and do, work in any of these branches with more or less facility, but employers cannot. Their interests are distinct. They do not fraternize any more than if

they belonged to distinct trades. The printer and publisher of a newspaper is quite indifferent as to the rules and prices of a job printer; the book printer is equally unconcerned as to the practices of a card printer—quite as much removed from collusion as from competition.

*Morning Newspapers.*—There are twenty-four daily newspapers in New York city, viz.: eighteen printed in English language, three in German, two in French, one in Danish. Twelve of them are morning papers. In all cases they own their types and presses. Most of them have abundant capital, and employ many compositors, who are always men. The weekly wages are \$24, for sixty hours of work, twelve of which must be in daytime. For night-work only, the rate is \$22 for a week of forty-eight hours. Piece-work is paid at the rate of 50 cents per 1000 ems, unless it is all done at night, for which the rate is 55 cents per 1000 ems. For unemployed time they receive 40 cents an hour. At these rates, the earnings of a piece compositor vary from \$20 to \$35 per week. The average earnings of all regular workmen may be put at \$27 per week. Although the piece rates are but little higher than those of book-work, a morning-paper situation is considered as one of the best in the trade.

*Evening Newspapers.*—There are nine evening newspapers. Weekly wages are \$20 for sixty hours of work. The price per 1000 ems of common matter is 45 cents. Most of the work is done by the piece. Situations on evening papers are preferred by most piece compositors. The earnings are fully up to or exceed the weekly rate.

*Other Newspapers and Periodicals.*—The Business Directory of this year contains the names of about 375 periodicals not previously described. This number embraces every kind of a periodical from a semi-annual to a tri-weekly—from a magazine of 500,000 ems to a leaflet of 15,000 ems. Three or four of these periodicals are printed by their publishers, who own both types and presses; a larger number own the types and do their composition, but have their press-work done by

the trade: but most of these periodicals have both composition and press-work done by book or job printers, or by the compositors of newspapers. The wages of the men workmen are substantially the same as those paid by the evening newspapers—\$20 a week and 45 cents per 1000 ems. These situations are not in special request. On some papers compositors will earn over \$20 a week, but on most the average is below \$17. Much of the work is done by boys and girls, who work at about two-third rates.

By book journeymen and employers, newspaper composition is rated as the simplest kind of work. It requires the least capital, and keeps that capital in most constant use. Better than any other branch, it allows the use of boys. Prices are consequently lower than for any other kind of composition. Although weekly or monthly newspaper work is done by several book and job printing houses, there are several offices in which it is the exclusive business.

*Compositors of Newspapers.*—This branch of newspaper printing is seriously damaged by competition, both in the ranks of the employers and the employed. Journeymen complain that it is infested with boys, girls and 'two-thirders, who deprive or prevent union men from employment; employers complain that the competition and sharp practices of journeymen who have suddenly become employers, have so debased the rates that they have no alternative but to employ an undue proportion of two-thirders. The causes and effects of this competition deserve investigation. The employers' rate for this class of work is 80 and 85 cents per 1000 ems. To a thrifty weekly newspaper, with a large circulation, this rate is not a serious tax; to a paper struggling for existence it is a heavy burden. Unfortunately, the latter is the larger class. Like all other close or needy buyers, newspaper publishers use every effort to have their work done cheaply. They continually invite proposals, and usually give the work to the lowest bidder. As a rule, all these publishers prefer to have the work done in an office where composition and press-work can be done by the same firm—all the better if forms can be electrotyped, papers folded and mailed under the same



roof. Printers who can furnish this accommodation know that the rates given cannot be reduced with profit or safety.

The composition of a weekly newspaper that contains 200,000 ems will furnish steady employment for six men. Unlike any other branch of printing, the materials required for such a paper are comparatively cheap; \$1000 judiciously spent, and sometimes much less, will suffice for the outfit. The securing of the composition of such newspapers is the means by which many active and enterprising compositors set themselves up in business. But the work can be secured only by making a lower bid than the established rate. Few compositors who are bent on going in business have any hesitation in making bids of 75 or 70 cents. There are those who have offered 65 and 60 cents, and even less. Such a prospective employer is sure that he can do the work at less than established rates. He will work himself, and secure a profit from the labor of six men. More: he will make up, read proof, and keep his own accounts, and save the expense of time-hands, clerks and proof-reader. The fallacy in this proposition is not perceived. In practical work, he finds that he does not profit by the saved expense of these time-hands. The only difference between his method and that of his late employer is, that he does with his own hands for little or nothing, the same work for which others pay money. The established employer spends money for the labor; the new employer wastes or gives away time. In either case the cost of the work is substantially the same. One party is paid for it; the other is not.

A year's experience proves that the reduced rates are too low. The amateur employer finds, in many cases, that he has not netted journeyman's wages. It is a dreadful discovery for a journeyman who has always stood out for high prices to find, after a year of extra unpaid labor in management and responsibility, that he has been ratting, that he has actually been working for less than \$20 per week. What can he do? To raise the price on the publisher is impossible. He has but one alternative—to discharge one or more of his men, and put on boys at two-third rates. He does it.

It is seldom that an established employer allows work like this to pass out of his hands without a struggle. He imitates

the amateur employer's tactics. He farms out the composition to his foreman. It is not difficult to find a workman who will contract to do all the work connected with composition and reading for a rate per 1000 ems closely approximating that of the journeyman. This contractor pays the hands and takes the responsibility; the employer furnishes only the room and the materials. To cover the cost of the proof-reading and the making-up, and other time work, it is understood that the contractor shall have the right to hire boys or two-thirders. It is by methods like these that the rates of newspaper composition have been reduced, and that the trade is filled with boys working at reduced rates. The reduction of prices has been but slightly affected by the rivalry of established offices; it is the competition of amateur employers that has been most effectual in crowding the newspaper trade with two-thirders.

*Printers and Publishers of Books and Magazines.*—There are about half-a-dozen firms or incorporations that, in addition to publishing, own and control manufactories in which every branch of book-making is done. All of these houses are wealthy—made so, however, not by printing, but by publishing. All have large composing rooms and employ many workmen. Weekly wages are \$20; but most of the work is done at the established rates of 47 to 53 cents per 1000 ems to men; 40 cents to girls; and two-thirds of men's rates to boys. The earnings of the men at these rates vary from \$12 to \$24 per week. The higher figure is seldom reached; the average earnings are nearer \$15 per week. The complaint of the workmen in these offices is, that they are too irregularly employed; that they are often denied work while boys and girls are kept in full employment. Even with this drawback, the printing office of a publisher is preferred by the compositor to that of the regular book printer, for the publisher who owns a printing office is better able to keep it supplied with work. The publishers say that they provide the work too often to their own disadvantage, in the giving out of works of slow or doubtful sale. They are induced to take this course because they have

materials they wish to keep employed, and because they pay no master-printer's profit on the composition and press-work.

*Book Printers or Stereotypers.*—Under this heading may be included the offices that make stereotype plates or print books only, to the order of the publishers. Of this class there are not more than twenty firms. Some of them do nothing but composition and stereotyping; some nothing but press-work. Nor is book-work the chief business of the remainder. There are but seven offices in this city that can be properly considered as exclusive book-houses. Even if a more liberal construction were made—if twenty more job and pamphlet and law-case printers were rated as book printers, the disproportion of book printers to that of the 150 book publishers is apparently anomalous. The contrast of these figures is enough to show that the book printing of New York city, if it has not declined, has certainly not kept even pace with the wealth and population, or even with the growth of the publishing trade. The older printers of the city, who have some recollection of the number of compositors then employed by Messrs. Trow, Craighead, Benedict, Fanshaw, Ludwig, Smith, Jenkins, Reed & Cunningham, Adey, and many others, and contrast the many book offices of that day with the few book offices of this, will readily admit that the book-printing trade of New York has not increased as it should have done.

The wages in all offices are the same as those of the book publishers and printers—\$20 a week for the men on time; 47 to 53 cents per 1000 ems for piece-work to men; 40 cents per 1000 ems to girls; two-thirds of men's rates to boys. The earnings of the men are rather less than of those in the publishers' offices; \$12 per week may be hazarded as the average of all men throughout the year. At established rates, a good workman, on fair work, may earn \$24 a week; but he seldom has the opportunity. Compositors complain that the work is exceedingly irregular—that a month of activity is followed by a month of idleness; that work is done with injudicious haste, and without regard to their convenience; that they frequently stand idle for want of letter or of proof; that the quality of work offered is unprofitable, consisting largely of



bad manuscript or difficult work, and quite inferior in value to that done here twenty years ago; that proof-readers are nicer and more exacting, and do not allow the compositor to make speed.

Admitting the truth of most of these claims, the employers reply that the losses occasioned by irregular supply of work are caused by the orders of the publisher; they work only to order, and have to do the work in the time and in the manner desired; that the losses by delayed proofs and overworked fonts of letter are as great to them as to the workmen. It is an evil they cannot prevent. They further say, that the quality of the work is beyond their control; that the fat reprints and easy work, the proofs of which are never meddled with by author or publisher, are for that very reason done outside of the city at cheaper rates; that the composition that is refused at any rate less than 47 cents by New York compositors, is done not sixty miles distant, to the satisfaction of the publisher, by girls, at 20 cents per 1000 ems and \$3 per week. The inequality between the New York and the rural price is so great that competition by men is hopeless. The alleged unfairness of keeping two-thirds and girls on fat work in city offices, while men have lean work, it is claimed, is nearly always caused by this competition. The employer who so apportions his work is striving, rather ineffectually, to compete with the country printer. In the matter of rates, employers state that they are now paying to men an unusually large proportion of their receipts, as may be seen by the following table:

	Year				
	1850	1862	1863	1864	1869
Workman's Charge for Composition per 1000 ems.....	27	32	36	50	53
Employer's Charge for Composition per 1000 ems.....	50	55	60	90	90
Percentage of advance made by employer .....	85	72	66 $\frac{3}{4}$	80	70

The prices quoted are the extreme prices of both compositor and employer.

Although the book composition of this city is now done at the smallest margin of profit, this contrast of the rates for different years does not fairly indicate the relative expense.

Work is now done by much more expensive methods. A book printer has to keep much larger fonts of type, and in much greater variety of faces; he has to condemn these types as worn out when they have had less service; he has to pay relatively much higher rates for proof-reading and for supervision; he has to do his work in greater haste; he can only hope to do the most troublesome and least profitable kind of work. The 53 cents paid for composition of 1000 ems of solid manuscript is but for a part of the labor. The matter has to be read, and supervised, at a large increase of cost—never less than one-fourth, sometimes more than one-third of the compositors' charge. When other contingent expenses are added, the cost of 1000 ems done exclusively by men's labor is rarely ever less than 80 cents. At this estimate the profit cannot be more than 10 cents per 1000 ems. It is too often less. As compositors do not average more than 5000 ems per day, the profit of the employer on each man is less than 50 cents per day.

In 1850-2, a regular piece compositor, in a large book office, could depend, with reasonable certainty, upon earning \$9 a week at the rate of 27 cents per 1000. In 1872, the same workman, in a similar office, at the rate of 50 cents, will not average \$16 a week. He finds that although he has nearly doubled his rates, he has not doubled his income—that every advance in wages is followed by hindrances in the method of doing work that much diminish his performance.

There are other reasons why the earnings of the book compositor do not increase with the advance in wages.

The increasing prevalence of incompetent workmen in the ranks of journeymen is a common complaint with employers. Few workmen know how to make-up, to make margin, impose, display titles, or set neat tables, or do other work that pertains to the duties of a good printer. Most of them know only how to set type; too many cannot do this properly. The slow and faulty compositor is paid as much per 1000 ems as the good; but he unfairly adds to the labor of the foreman and reader, he destroys type, delays other workmen, and in every way is a serious hindrance.

The average compositor does not always accept work at the prices that have been approved and adopted by the Union.

He does not incline to steady situations. So long as the work on which he may be engaged proves to be fat and pays well, he will remain; if it is lean or troublesome, he throws up his situation. He often prefers to be idle for days together rather than take a case at any job that will compel him to harder exertion to make full wages. The city has always been full of compositors of this stamp—always changing, always on the lookout for a time situation and fat piece-work—unable to see that they lose more time and money in these repeated changes than they would by sticking to one office and sharing its luck. It is this incompetency of the ordinary workmen, and the restlessness and shirking of implied obligations by the good compositors, that have induced many employers to overstock their offices with boys and two-thirders. It is claimed that they do their work quite as well as the poor workman, and that they will stick to their work.

The evil from which employing book printers most suffer is the want of remunerative work. There is scarce a book office in the city that has not material enough to do thrice the work that is done. The types and men are idle more than half the time. The work that should be done in the city goes abroad. The established rate of the New York printers for composition and stereotyping is \$1.35 per 1000 ems, but many good houses have reduced the rate to \$1.25. The reduction is not enough to meet the views of publishers. They get the work done in interior and eastern cities and villages for \$1.00, for 95, for 90 cents. Not even at the two-third rates of boys or girls can New York employers compete with these prices. But this competition of interior towns, annoying as it is, is not as menacing as that of Europe.

When the price of labor began to rise in this country, shrewd buyers went abroad to seek advantages they could not get here. They found in England that labor could be had at half the American rate; in Holland and Germany at nearly one-third our prices. Nothing but the rates of exchange and the high premium on gold prevented the transfer to foreign printers of a large portion of our printed work. The times have changed. The premium on gold is comparatively trivial. It will pay an American publisher to have his books made



abroad. It will pay any English printer or publisher to make an effort to get a foothold in the American market. The imagined profits are large. The book that costs, if made in America, \$1 per copy, can be made in England at the cost of, at most, 80 cents a copy.

The first steps for this long-threatened transfer of work have already been taken. One of our largest publishing houses ~~has already established a~~ printing house in London. ~~Another is making preparations.~~ We may be sure that many others will soon follow their example. It is not a matter of choice, but of necessity. If American publishers wait any longer, foreign houses will acquire the control of the American book trade.

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The American printing offices that have initiated this experiment of foreign manufacture are wealthy and own large printing offices, in which they pay no master-printer's profits; they have the power and the knowledge to institute any economy they may fancy in the manufacture of their work. With all these advantages, they deliberately decide to let a portion of their capital, invested at home in printing machinery, lie idle; they ~~decide to equip new printing offices~~ abroad, and submit to the inconvenience of dependence on a manufactory three thousand miles distant. There are other publishers who are deliberating on the superior advantages and still cheaper labor of cities in Germany. A few months more and we shall see books by American authors and publishers that have been printed in foreign offices. Who is responsible for this national disgrace?

*and it  
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to me*

There is a large amount of book-work done in New York that is not stereotyped, nor sold by the regular publishers of the trade. Law cases, catalogues and pamphlets are the most noticeable examples. Like weekly newspapers, this class of work does not require a large outlay for types. The press-work is usually trivial: it is often done on a cheap hand-press; if not done where the type is set, it can be done by other printers without loss and with little inconvenience. This work offers a fine opportunity to a journeyman to commence business. It has been largely followed, and this is the result. In 1860, when wages were \$11 per week, the price of law cases per page was 75 cents; in 1872, when wages are \$20,

the nominal price is \$1.25 per page. Wages advance 81 per cent.; employers' prices advance 60 per cent. Yet the price is but nominal. More than half the law-work of the city is done at \$1.10, \$1.00 or 95 cents per page. In catalogues and pamphlets there is a similar debasement of prices.

*Job Printers.*—Under this heading may be placed at least 350 printing offices, more unequal in their appointments than those of any other class. Some of them do book-work, and have stereotype foundries; many have stationery stores and book-binderies, or lithographic or engraving offices, and keep employed many cylinder presses; but at least half of the number have no power presses, and do but an inconsiderable amount of business.

In this branch of printing there is no piece-work. All men compositors are paid at the uniform rate of \$20 per week. The smallest offices, that do not use power presses, rarely employ men; boys, at \$5 to \$10 a week, do nearly all the work. In the larger offices good men have steady employment, and in busy seasons they frequently do over-work at 50 cents an hour. Among journeymen, situations in job offices are preferred, and there is a constant effort on the part of incompetent men to get in the ranks. All employers agree that the job trade is full of inefficient and uneducated workmen. While job compositors are not seriously discontented with their wages, the proprietors of most job offices are disheartened at the ruinous competition now prevailing, and with the menacing aspects of the future. The extent of this competition will be more clearly understood by a comparison of the figures in the annexed table.

<i>Current prices for job work:</i>	—1860—	—1872—	
	The Regular Rate.	Fair Established Rate.	The Competi- tive Rate.
Billheads, per ream.....	\$7.50	\$10.00	\$8.00
Business Cards, No. 4, per 1000.....	3.50	4.75	3.00
Letter Headings, per ream.....	5.00	6.50	4.00
Handbills, med. 8vo., per 1000.....	2.75	3.00	2.00
“ “ “ 10,000.....	12.50	15.00	10.00
Posters, half med., 1000 .....	5.00	7.50	5.00
Railroad Blanks, per ream.....	5.50	7.00	5.60
Letter Circulars, 1 page, $\frac{1}{2}$ sheet, 1000, .....	5.50	7.50	6.00

The equity of the prices under the heading Fair Established Rate should need no further justification than the simple statement of the facts that the paper, ink, and materials used in this class of work have advanced, since 1860, from 10 to 60 per cent., and that labor has advanced by 82 per cent. In no instance is the present price more than 50 per cent. This insufficient advance shows the pressure of competition. It shows, too, that in the fixing of these prices the job printer has given to the buyer much of the advantages of improved machinery and organization.

The insufficiency of the Competitive Rates of 1872 is as clearly demonstrated. In the face of this large advance in the price of labor and materials, the prices are really lower than they were in 1862. These low prices are notorious. They are advertised in newspapers and street cars; they are brought to the notice of every business man by handbills, by drummers and bores. Buyers who know nothing and care nothing about the cost of labor or paper, are kept well-advised that there is a keen competition among job printers, and that prices are going downward. Such an indifferent buyer forms the erroneous conclusion that the difference in rates really represents the difference in profit. It is difficult to make him understand that at least half of this difference or reduction is made by inferior and slovenly workmanship; that the other half of this reduction is made by persons who do not know the cost or the value of work. To the ordinary business man this latter statement seems incomprehensible. It is not the less true. The charge is repeated with emphasis. Not half the persons in New York who make estimates and give prices for printing know the cost of doing the work. What is still more unfortunate, they have that "little knowledge," so dangerous a thing, which prevents them from learning any more.

Fifteen years ago, every man, so far as the writer's recollection can be trusted, who was the proprietor or manager of a job printing office in New York city was a printer. At different periods of his life he had been errand boy, compositor or pressman, proof-reader, foreman, book-keeper. There was no part of the business with which he was not



more or less familiar. He not only knew how to do the work, but he knew the time it would take, and the expense it would involve. The proprietors or managers of the most reputable offices, large or small, who, in face of an active competition, still cling to established rates, are all of this class.

Within ten years, many new proprietors have appeared who are entirely ignorant of the business. As stationers or booksellers, they have a fair knowledge of the current prices of the more common kinds of commercial work; of the cost or value of doing that work they know nothing whatever. Every proprietor of such an office—and there are many of them—has found it necessary to secure the services of a manager—a practical printer, who must be the foreman of the men, and by turns, must be salesman, buyer, book-keeper and maker of estimates. For one or two of these departments it is not difficult to find competent journeymen; but it is rare to find, at any price, a practical man who knows how to make correct estimates as well as how to manage work. But it is impossible for a novice to carry on the business without such a manager. Liberal salaries are offered. Compositors who have insufficient qualifications—a deficiency which the proprietor cannot discover—are induced, by high wages, to take this responsible position. The false position of such a manager is made much worse by the technical ignorance of his employer, who is continually and eagerly pressing this manager for low estimates in order that he may get more work. The manager tries to meet his views.

Here is an anomaly. As a journeyman, the compositor has clear convictions as to the value of his labor. In case of doubt he always takes the safe side, and charges his employer the highest rate. He runs no risk, for he has the Union at his back. The same compositor, suddenly transmuted into the manager of a stationer's office, has grave doubts as to the justice of employer's established prices. He perceives that they are too high; he sees many ways whereby they can be reduced without loss. He is sure that he can do what they cannot—that he can make money where others lose. The first result of this newly-awakened perception of justice is that

he frequently accepts work for his employer at rates that he would refuse as a journeyman; the second result, sometimes long delayed, is his retirement from office. The employing stationer, in balancing his books, at the end of one or more years, discovers that his printing has been done at less than cost. He has lost money by his experiment.

While there has been an apparent decrease in the number of strict book-printing houses, there has been a great increase in job offices. The same causes that induce some active and ambitious compositors to undertake the composition of a newspaper, or the management of a stationer's office, induce others to try the experiment of going in business. It does not require large capital to set up as a job printer. One Gordon press and a few fonts of card type enable one to do small cards, bill-heads and labels. Such an office becomes at once a rival to the largest office for this class of work. Some of our largest offices are the growth of the most trivial beginnings. Some of our ablest printers are the proprietors of these small offices.

To establish an independent business is a laudable ambition, but the zeal that prompts to such a step is not always accompanied with proper knowledge. Not every man so tempted pauses to consider whether another employer is really needed in the trade; whether, needed or not, he has the capital and the ability to maintain his foothold. To the dispassionate observer, who ponders the fact that in these 350 job offices not half the hands are kept in constant employment, it is quite clear that there are offices that are not needed. As business does not come to such offices, they have to seek it. But when it is found, it can be had only by underbidding. Here, as in the case of the manager of the stationer's office, the young employer seldom knows how to make estimates. He has even a stronger temptation to make low prices. He usually thinks it better to work at cost than not to work. His common mistake is that he cannot calculate cost, and really works for less. It takes many months, perhaps years, before the consequences of the error are brought home to him. He works hard, but, in too many cases, his income is less than that of a journeyman. He not only loses himself,

but is the cause of greater losses to his older rivals. He debases the prices of others by unsuccessful estimates for work that he cannot do.

The older master-printers have made frequent attempts to establish a greater uniformity of price, but all to little purpose. The managers and novices are too often above the advice of their fellow-employers, and are always beyond the control of the Union. They can neither be coaxed nor coerced to refrain from a competition which is as damaging to the journeymen as it is to themselves and to their brother employers. So long as there are more printing offices in the city than there is work for, so long we may expect this debasement of prices.

The worst feature connected with this overcrowding of the trade is that it has degraded the business. The custom that should come to one's house in a natural way is begged and scrambled for in the most despicable manner.

By far the larger portion of the small job work of this city, of such kinds as can be done on treadle presses, is now done in job offices in which boys are almost exclusively employed. It is with the extremest difficulty that any office employing men can offer prices for this class of work that will be accepted.

In reply to these undeniable truths concerning the reduced prices of employers, the journeymen make this reply: "It is not our affair. We are not responsible for your low prices. You must keep up your own rates." It is not a proper answer. For the low prices now ruling in this city, the workmen, more than the employers, are responsible. The reckless estimates and the thoughtless competition that have debased prices can, in at least two out of every three cases, be traced to men who have but recently come from the ranks of the journeymen, and who are thoroughly saturated with the notion that the business is profitable, and that it can be made, under their peculiar management, to yield even greater profits.

In the department of small job work, the larger offices have long ago retired from competition with the small ones, and have endeavored to establish new branches of business



for which skillful men and large machinery must be employed. Here, too, unexpected competition has been developed.

The steam lithographic press is a most formidable competitor. Introduced within three years, it has already succeeded in wresting from the hands of printers of this city nearly a million dollars of business. It is but the beginning of an unknown end. With increased experience in the use of these machines, and especially in their adaptation to small work, we may safely predict that, in a few years, mercantile blanks printed on stone will be as cheap and as common as those done from type. The application of photo-lithography in the economical reproduction of book and table work is no longer an experiment but a triumphant success.

The other competitor is the cheaper labor of foreign countries. Hitherto, job printers have felt secure against outside influences. It has been said that, if books might go abroad, jobs must be done here. It is a great mistake. The city is thoroughly canvassed by agents of foreign printers. Show cards, illustrated catalogues, labels, pamphlet covers, and even billheads and cards, are now done abroad at prices with which no American can compete. The value of this foreign work cannot be defined; but it is already large and is increasing. One printing house in London has thirty presses in constant employment on American orders. There are other printing houses in the same city that do a large amount of business in this country. Large orders for work are also sent to Paris, Leipsic and Berlin. This work goes there, not because it is done better, but because it is so much cheaper. One is within bounds in stating that there goes abroad, from this city alone, every year, job work enough to keep three hundred men employed. We have the skill, the men and the materials, but, at present prices, they cannot be used.

This part of the subject cannot be dismissed without calling attention to the inequality in the ability of these five classes of employing printers to pay the proposed increased prices. The publishers of books, magazines, and newspapers, who own and manage printing offices, are in the receipt of ample incomes from the profits of publishing. To this class the

addition of twenty per cent. to the cost of labor is a serious tax, but it is not a crushing weight. Manufacturers of a book or paper, who originate the work and direct it at every step, and who control the sale and fix the price, have the power to institute nice economies in all the branches, so that they will not suffer the entire loss of this twenty per cent. If composition is relatively too high, they can reduce cost of paper or binding. In many ways they can hedge an anticipated loss. Even if they conceded the entire master printer's profit to meet the increased price of composition, it would not destroy their profit on other branches of manufacture.

The book or job printer has no such opportunities. His work is done to order only, and it must be done exactly as agreed on, and at the regular current rate. He makes profit from but one branch, where the publisher makes his from many branches. If the book printer's profits on labor are encroached on, he has no other branch that will aid him in bearing the weight. He is, and always must be, unable to pay as high a rate for labor as the publisher.

While this proposed increase of twenty per cent. is a crushing weight to the old-established book or job printer, it is really no tax at all to that printer's most formidable city competitor. The small job office, in which all the work is done by the proprietor and his boys, can be quite indifferent to any advance in the price of labor that may be ordained by the Union. The advance may be a real benefit. The proprietor and his boys can maintain the old rates, while the larger offices that employ men are obliged to add thirty per cent. to the old prices. This is the reason why the present prices of small job work are substantially the same as those of 1862. A further increase of rate will increase the advantage of the small office. Its tendency is to break down printing offices of the middle class, and to increase the number of small offices. No thoughtful compositor, who deploras the evils suffered by the trade from an excess of boys, can desire a multiplication of small offices, in which he can never find employment—offices that are the real nurseries of the boys that cut down his wages and that keep him out of work in other establishments.

The unfair manner in which the repeated advances in prices have been made, by discriminating against book and job work, is clearly shown in the annexed table.

Branch of Composition.	1862.	1870.	Advance Per Cent.
Job and Book Work.. Weekly Wages.	\$11.00	\$20.00	.82
Book Work..... Piece Rates*....	.33	.50	.52
Morning Newspaper.. Weekly Wages.	16.00	24.00	.50
“ “ .. Piece Rates....	.35	.50	.43
Evening Newspaper.. Weekly Wages.	12.00	20.00	.67
“ “ .. Piece Rates....	.31	.45	.45

\*Average of Manuscript and Reprint, for matter made-up.

The book and job printer, who employs men only by the week, has to pay nearly twice as large a percentage as does the publisher of the morning newspaper. The newspaper rate is but 43 per cent. advance on old prices, while that of the book and job printer is 82 per cent. The relative ability of the two classes to pay an advance would be inadequately stated by the transposition of these figures. This is but a sample of the invidious discrimination. For ten hours' day work in a job office, the rate is \$20 a week; for eight hours' night work, on a morning paper, \$22. For time work done at night, the job printer pays 50 cents an hour; for the same work, the morning or evening paper pays but 40 cents per hour. The Sunday paper hand must work over hours on Saturday without pay; but the book or job hand must work one hour less. This, surely, is not accident. After this exposition of policy, it is not surprising to find that the movement for advance in prices is levelled at the book and job offices, and that the newspaper offices, as in 1869, are overlooked. It is not enough that New York city—in which prices are highest, in which profits are least, and in which the pressure of competition is greatest—should be selected for trying the experiment of eight hours and higher prices, but that branch of the trade in the city which is least able to afford it is the one that is first picked out for punishment.

The thoughtful reader will see that the complaints of both employers and employed are alike: on the part of the em-



ployers, insufficient work, insufficient profits, unfair competition; on the part of the employed, irregular work, meagre earnings, the unfair competition of boys. There is certainly sufficient cause for discontent, but how shall it be remedied?

The journeymen propose what is equivalent to a general increase of prices. For it is admitted by them that the effect of the proposed reduction in the hours of labor will soon tend to a positive increase in time wages. It is well understood that the work of the city cannot be done in eight hours. Nor do the applicants as a body really wish to strictly confine the day's labor to eight hours. If they could get the price of overtime for the added two hours, at the rate of 50 or 60 cents an hour, they would work ten hours willingly. This point should be clearly understood. The application of the workmen is not so much to shorten hours, as to increase wages. The increase required is unusually large. If 20 or 25 per cent. be added to wages, not less than 30 per cent., perhaps 33 per cent., must be added to the prices of the employers. It is a hazardous experiment, and one that should be well considered before it is tried.

To ascertain the views of individual employers in regard to this proposed increase of prices, and to elicit other pertinent facts, the following circular was sent to every known book and job office in the city:

NEW YORK, June 25, 1872.

To

*At a meeting (held at the Astor House, Friday, June 21, 1872) of a Joint Committee of the Employers and Employed in the trade of Book and Job Printing, appointed by their respective societies for the purpose of considering the expediency of establishing eight hours as the limit of a day's labor, and of increasing the rate of piece work twenty per cent., it was decided, as a necessary preliminary, that the Secretary of the Employers be directed to furnish a Report on the State of the Trade, to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee for its consideration.*

*As the question of Eight Hours and Higher Prices affects every person connected with Printing, it is hoped that every Printer and Publisher will see the importance of furnishing the Committee with the facts upon which their action must be based.*

*The answers received will not be published. It is proposed to collect the facts and figures of these answers, and to present them to the Trade only in the form of a condensed general statement.*

*As the time allowed for the preparation of these facts is short, it is earnestly begged that answers will be made without delay.*

*Any other information on this subject not included in these questions will be thankfully received.*

THEO. L. DE VINNE,  
Secretary.

## COMMITTEE OF JOURNEYMEN.

M. R. WALSH, with Geo. F. Nesbitt & Co.

W. PHILP, with Harper & Brothers.

R. W. COX, with Poole & MacLauchlan.

A. K. GORE, with New York Register.

E. B. TUTTLE, with New York Herald.

J. A. GANONG, with N. Y. Com. Advertiser.

J. KELLY, with D. Appleton & Co.

## COMMITTEE OF EMPLOYERS.

M. B. WYNKOOP, of Wynkoop & Hallenbeck.

E. O. JENKINS.

R. H. SMITH, of Smith & McDougall.

JOHN POLHEMUS.

S. W. GREEN.

J. J. LITTLE, of Lange, Little & Hillman.

T. L. DE VINNE, of Francis Hart & Co.

1.—*What is the average number of compositors employed on piece-work in your office?*

Men.

Boys.

2.—*What were their average earnings in 1871?*

Men.

Boys.

3.—*What were their average earnings in 1868?*

Men.

Boys.

4.—*To what extent are you affected by the lower prices of competitors either in or out of the city?*

5.—*Can you furnish an estimate of the annual value of the work once done in your office, and now done out of the city?*

6.—*At the established rates of employers, and under fair economical management, what is your estimate of the employer's profit on book composition?*

On book presswork?

7.—*Could you pay an advance of twenty per cent. on piece rates out of present profits?*

8.—*Would your customers assent, or could you compel their assent, to an advance of twenty per cent. or more on present prices?*

9.—*What do you consider the reasons of the present depressed condition of the printing business?*

10.—*What do you propose as a practicable remedy?*

To Question 1 not enough answers have been received to justify the writer in offering a statement of the number of workmen in the trade. So far as the limited replies will warrant, the facts are at singular variance with the preconceived theories. The proportion of boys to men in the large book and job offices is singularly small. Eight of the larger book offices make returns as shown in the margin. In the smaller offices there are more boys than men. It shows the more difficult nature of the work in the larger offices, and their preference for men as compositors.

Men.	Boys.
8	—
27	5
15	—
7	1
12	—
20	—
14	—
52	3

Questions 2 and 3 have not been as fully answered as could be desired. The following table, that gives a contrast of the wages of some offices, will be instructive.

	1871.	1868.
But two offices have made a return of	\$16.51	\$14.85
higher earnings in 1871. It would appear that the higher rates of 1871 really	13.00	14.00
decreased the year's earnings of the piece	10.92	11.93
compositor. It shows an increasing	17.00	20.00
scarcity of work, and more difficulty in	22.00	25.00
doing that work, to the loss of both employer and employed. It is a fact that has a direct bearing on the proposition before us. If the slight advance of 1869	14.00	14.00
decreased earnings, would not the larger advance of 1872	20.00	18.00
have a still more disastrous effect?		

High rates do not necessarily increase earnings. The marking-up of the prices of goods during a dull season is not the method pursued by a merchant to increase his income. It should not be our method. It is not rates but earnings that we need. It is the marking-up of the rates that will defeat this desire.

To Questions 4 and 5 every book printer has replied emphatically in the affirmative. Two job printers profess indifference to competition; but all the others agree in the statement that they are constantly underbid by printers in and out of the city. The estimates of probable loss of work are very large, but they are too incomplete and too irregular to be put in the form of a tabular statement. A careful review



of the replies to these inquiries, and of the facts furnished by publishers, warrants the statement that more than half of the books recently published in this city were composed and stereotyped in other cities. Add this to the very reasonable estimate of probable loss on job work, and it will be seen that the work of New York, now done out of New York, is more than enough to keep every printer in it fully employed.

These are some of the answers :

Idle about half the time.—Find it very difficult to get a fair price.—I get on average one out of five jobs for which I estimate; the invariable answer is, I can get it done lower.—Two of my best customers send their work to Buffalo, another sends to Europe; many others go to New England.—\$10,000 of work once done by me is now done out of the city.—Three-fourths of the work offered I have to decline for insufficiency of price.—Can do no work whatever that my customers can wait long enough to get done in other cities where prices are cheaper.—I have lost one-fourth of my business.—In every estimate I give I have to consider the alternative of the work going out of the city.—Am offered more than twice the work I do, but can't accept it at the price.—I do nothing but troublesome work, upon which neither myself nor the compositor makes wages.—All the good work goes out of the city.—Lost last month one job of \$3,000, that went out of the city.—Have to do work at just above cost or not do it at all.—If I could work at the Eastern rates, I could do twice the business.—After long trial I've given up competing with country offices, to the loss of half our business.—Steam lithographic presses are now doing a large portion of my former business.—I can get work done by other printers cheaper than I can do it in my own office.—Competition has reduced our profits to a mere nothing.—More than half our composition has been lost to us.—We have lost all the plain composition we once had.—My customers get composition and press-work combined, in inland towns, at less rates than I can furnish composition alone.

To Question 6 there is great disagreement in responses. The highest figure given is "25 per cent., less the depreciation and contingent expenses." It is evidently the response of one who has not deduced this calculation from his account books. One of the largest houses, well known in the trade for the ability of its management, says that it has made no profit whatever on book composition for three years. Another house, equally noted for its care and accuracy, puts the profits at 7 per cent. The majority of responses make the returns of 10 and 12 per cent. The responses appended indicate the general sentiment of the trade.

Book-work pays too poorly for me to meddle with it.—Don't set type ; can get it done cheaper.—Book-work is the poorest kind of work ; it is not worth trying to keep.—Do no book-work now ; gave it up, after long trial, as utterly unprofitable.—Consider composition only as a feeder to press-work ; have never yet been able to find any profit in it.

To Question 7 there is a unanimous negative. It is not necessary to add a word of comment.

Most decidedly not.—Impossible to get any advance, or pay any.—Might get a slight advance on some kinds of work, but not enough to pay 20 per cent.—No ! No ! (in nearly all replies).—Could not get nor give 5 per cent.—We don't make 20 per cent. profit, and could not pay it.—Impossible to get or give.—It would break us to pay it ; it would lose us our business to try to get it.—Absolutely ridiculous to ask such questions.—Certainly not.—A very hazardous step to try.—Any advance either in wages or prices is impossible.—Customers would be great fools to pay any advance, when they can get their work done so much cheaper in inland towns or abroad.—A silly experiment—one that I won't try.—If I compel my customer to pay this advance he will do it but once or twice ; he will take his work away to cities where it can be done cheaper. If I get it back again, it will be at a still lower price than he now pays.—Not one customer would comply : we should only lose the work.

To Question 8 three answers have been received, in which the writers state substantially that they object to any advance, and do not admit its necessity ; but that they would try to secure it if it was adopted. All other employers have replied that they could not get the advance. Most of them have made this statement in the most emphatic manner.

Many of the leading publishers of the city have been consulted with reference to their ability to pay the proposed advance. All of them say that it is impossible. They agree in saying that such an advance can have no other effect than to drive still more work out of the city. They say that they are now paying an unfair proportion of their receipts for the work done here. In corroboration of this assertion, they point to the following facts : the pamphlet or magazine that was sold for 25 cents in 1862 is now sold for 35 cents ; the duodecimo, in cloth, that was sold for \$1.25 or \$1.50 in 1862 is now sold for but \$1.50 or \$1.75. These prices, which are as high as they can get, are at an average advance of less than 40 per cent., while the New York employing printers' charges are at an average advance of not less than 65 per cent.

Question 9 has excited extraordinary responses. The leading reasons assigned by book printers are :

Anxiety of too many employers to keep machinery in motion, even when no profit arises therefrom.—Lack of organization.—Drummers.—Unfair competition.—Stationers.—Ignorant workmen who know nothing about making estimates.—Foreign competition.—The Eight-hour movement.—Too many offices.—Reckless competition.—Too high price of labor, which drives work abroad and to small offices.—Unreasonably high price of labor.—Too many middlemen.—High price of materials and high labor (by many persons).—The poor quality and disproportionately high price of composition both by piece and on time.—Too high wages.—Too many offices.—Poor workmen.—Canvassing journeymen and stationers who do not understand the business.—High wages and poor work.—Too many printers.—Ignorant workmen who solicit orders.—Interference of workmen, as drummers, with the established prices; foreign competition.—High wages and high prices of types here; low wages and low materials abroad.—Too abundant labor of inferior grades, which is the bane of both skilled workman and his employer. If the skilled employer did not have to compete on so large a portion of his work with the inferior class, he could afford to pay more, and could get more. One of the evils to be feared from this movement is that it will stimulate this kind of competition.

To Question 10 not one response has been received that proposes eight hours as a practicable remedy, not one that advises or assents to any advance in wages. On the contrary, there are many who do not hesitate to state that the only remedy is an increase of hours or a reduction of wages, as may be gathered from a review of the annexed responses.

Better workmen (by many persons).—Refuse to work for middlemen; refuse to do work or give commissions to journeymen printers.—Discharge men; do less work, and do it ourselves.—Reduce wages (by many persons).—Refuse work to every man who does not understand his business.—Sell out.—Take the jouts into partnership, and make 'em pay their share of the losses.—Cut down wages, especially on plain work, and get some of lost work back.—Men's wages for men's work; boy's wages for boy's work.—Work ten hours a day, and longer.—A strike on the part of employers.—Compromise (one party only).—Reduce wages 10 per cent.—Kill the eight-hour movement.—An agreement with the workmen in every office that their wages shall depend on the profits of the office.

This is the substance of the responses. It is enough to show that employers are clearly of opinion that Eight Hours and Higher Prices are impracticable.

It is now time to ask the question—Is this advance in prices really needed? In all previous applications for higher



wages the demand has been justified by necessity. When the premium on gold was steadily advancing, and all the necessities of life were growing dearer, there was reason in the demand that wages should be increased. For this advance there is no such claim. It is not maintained that the expenses of living are higher now than they were in 1869. They are, no doubt, greater than we desire, but they are not increasing, as they were in 1863 and 1864, in every direction. That compositors should desire more wages is but natural; that an increase of wages would be of benefit to them is admitted; but that men who are now in the regular receipt of \$20 a week and upward, are driven by necessity to insist on higher wages, is not the belief of employers. No evidence has been presented that would lead to such a conclusion.

This movement for eight hours and higher prices did not originate with the printers of the city. It is an epidemic. There is strike in the air. It is one of the many plans for embittering the relations of American employers and employed for which we are indebted to the old world. It is by foreign emissaries and foreign workmen that the strikes and the agitations in other trades of our city have been fomented. It is by the subsidy of a foreign trade union that one of our largest associations of mechanics hoped to carry a strike. It is from the apostles of the International and the Commune that American mechanics have been unwittingly receiving teachings and orders. Every employing printer who has taken the trouble to make personal inquiry in his own office, is well satisfied that the majority of the compositors do not favor the movement. They have joined it with faint heart, if not with spoken protest, and only from a mistaken sense of fraternal obligation.

There is one exception. The book compositors of the city, whose earnings never reach \$20, are most seriously discontented. It is not because the present rates are too low. They are higher than those of the evening, and nearly as high as those of the morning papers. It is not because the Union has not carefully protected their interests. The present scale of prices is filled with safeguards for their benefit. All to little purpose. The morning paper hand averages \$27; the



evening paper hand at least \$22 ; but the book hand does not average \$14 per week. This is a miserable pittance. The unreflecting observer, who knows nothing of the circumstances of the case, at once rushes to the conclusion that the employer is in a false position in not seeing to it that the piece compositor is better paid. It is worth the while to look into these circumstances : is it the compositor or the employer who is in a false position ?

The scanty earnings of book compositors are attributed by workmen to the bad management of the office. Is this the only reason ? It is well known to all printers that there are compositors who are slow ; that the trade is full of men who, on good work, and with every opportunity for making speed, cannot earn \$14 a week, while others on the same work will make \$20 a week and more. The trade is full of men who can do nothing but set type. They stand idle daily, in and around offices that have matter to make-up and impose, jobs to set, tables to arrange, but they cannot do the work. There are also other men who will not work ten hours when they have the work to do. As piece-hands, they consider they have the right to come late and go early. Here are good reasons why their earnings should be inferior.

To compositors like these the higher rates would be of little benefit. The advance of twenty per cent. would be but a trifle in comparison with their expectations. At best, it could but raise their earnings to \$18 a week, which would be, as before, twenty-five per cent. less than the wages of the time-workman. To enable them to earn by the piece \$24 a week, as is desired, the rate would have to be raised to nearly \$1.00 per 1000 ems. This is impossible. But even if it were conceded, it would not end the matter. Give the inferior workman \$24 for work on time, and the man of skill would insist on \$30 for his superiority. Let this be conceded. A few weeks or months, and the inferior man will move for equality of pay with the best—not as a matter of favor, but as one of right. Here we begin to see the true motive of all this discontent, as well as the charming equity of a so-called minimum price for time work.

The slow, idle or unskilled workmen, who earn so little by the piece, or who have a precarious employment by time,

are the most clamorous in their demands for higher wages. The fact that they earn so little is repeated again and again, as if it were the end of all argument, even when they are paid the same rate and have the same opportunity as men who earn double. The undeniable fact that they do little work, and do it poorly, they consider as quite immaterial. "A working man ought to have \$20 a week, anyhow," was the remark made by a compositor three years ago to his employer. "Not if he don't earn it," was the answer. "I can pay you only by the same rule by which I am paid—which is, not for the time you spend on the work, but for the work that you do. If you can't or won't do more in ten hours than other men do in five, you are not entitled to more than \$10 a week." And what was the response? "I don't know anything about your affairs. I only know that I ought to get \$20 a week, the same as the other men. I need the money just as much, and can't live on less." This man was not specially unintelligent, and his views would not deserve repeating if they were not largely representative. They are the avowed doctrines of the International.

The abstract right of every man to receive from society a comfortable living, when he has complied with society's conditions, which no one will deny, is muddily mixed up with the notion that he has a right to exact good wages of every man who may be his employer, whether he has earned them or not—whether the employer can afford to pay them or not. For the credit of the trade, it is cheerfully confessed there are few compositors who would undertake to defend this absurd proposition in its full breadth, but there are many who have the idea that they are unfairly dealt with in the matter of wages. Who or what it is that is responsible for their low earnings does not clearly appear. At one time it is banks and speculators ; at another, tariffs and legislators ; but there is a substantial agreement, in nearly all cases, that capitalists and employers are the offenders.

Some years ago the writer had occasion to remark in a newspaper, that it was the belief of many journeymen printers that the profits of employers were too large, and were acquired by the retention of an unfair share of the com-

positors' labor. For making this statement he was sharply rebuked. He was assured that compositors were not socialists; that they respected the rights of capital and of property; they did but ask for their own—no more, no less. But the statement that was repelled as so obnoxious seven years ago, is now made in the frankest manner. Employers are told that their profits are unreasonable, and that there should be a more equitable apportionment; that workmen will never be satisfied until they get a much larger share of the rewards of labor. This larger share, this fair share, is never stated in figures. There are few of these claimants who would define this share at less than an advance of one-fourth on their present earnings; there are those who think that the relations of capital and labor could be so adjusted that they would receive one-half more than they now get. The ability of the employer to pay—or, at least, the ability of the business to earn—the advanced rate, is never doubted. The omnipotence of the Union, when associated with employers, to revolutionize laws of trade and to compel customers to pay higher rates is considered as beyond question. It is the vague but widespread notion of the ability of the business to pay large profits that has filled our city with small printing offices, and that has induced so many amateur employers to tamper so rashly with established prices, to their own injury. There are amateur employers (in the first year of their business life only) who know that they will make 50 per cent. on all the work they do; there are canvassing journeymen who ask for commissions of 25 and even 40 per cent. with most charming ingenuousness. These exhibitions of faith are the legitimate fruits of a pervading delusion.

Most employers consider this belief on the part of workmen as the evidences of ignorance and prejudice that are unworthy of consideration, and disdain reply. It certainly cannot be approached by ordinary methods of argument. Assertion can be met only by counter assertion and denial. It is enough to say that there is no large book or job office in this city that does or can yield an income that could pay the journeyman the ideal fair share of which he dreams. Take the year's net receipts of any such office; deduct the



legal interest on money invested ; set aside a proper sum for depreciation of material ; allow for the services of the managers only at their merchantable value ;—the remainder would be pitifully small. Divided *pro rata* among the employed of the office, it would never yield five dollars a week, often not one dollar a week. The principle of partnership, rigidly applied, would often reduce earnings. The fair and equitable share of the return of labor, so far from adding one-fourth or one-half to their incomes, would seem almost too contemptible for notice.

The annexed advertisement, from the New York Herald of July 14, 1872, is to the point.

**\$550** CASH WILL BUY TWO ORIGINAL SHARES OF THE JOUR-  
 neymen Printers' Co-operative Association (dividends included);  
 \$200 each original cost; has been in existence over five years. Address  
 J. S., &c.

This is an office that has been exclusively under the journeymen's control. It has able workmen ; it is creditably managed, and has good standing in the trade ; yet the stockholder virtually offers to sell out at cost, with simple interest added.\* Can the workmen in this office claim that they do not receive their fair share of the profits of labor ?

Here is the present impracticability of our schemes for co-operative industry. The employing book and job printers, who have frequently discussed this topic, would prefer to make engagements by which the pay of labor would be determined by the profits of labor. The great stumbling block is the paltriness and the irregularity of the profits. Sooner than accept the new duties and responsibilities, the inferior workman, who earns less than \$14 a week, would prefer the chance of bettering his condition by a strike.

The position of this inferior workman, an annoyance to all classes in all trades, is probably greater in printing than in any other. He needs protection continually. He never gets enough. The good workman can take care of himself without help. The superior workman always receives extra pay and special favor, without intervention of the Union or the

\* This selection of an example is made only because it has already been published. It is a fair illustration of the profits of the business—of the merchantable value of the average book and job printing office in New York.



State. But the inferior workman is continually clamoring for higher rates and more legislation. It is for his sake that the Union fills the scale of prices with vexatious restrictions. It is for his benefit that legislators are bored with applications for eight-hour and apprenticeship laws. That he may have the slender chance of earning two or three dollars a week extra, prices must be put so high that thousands of dollars' worth of work is driven out of the city. It is largely by his instigation that the trade is harassed with quarrels with employers. That he may receive the "minimum wages"—a charming phrase, that really means a certain sum of money for an uncertain amount of work—the better workman must virtually forego the superior pay to which he is entitled, and must unite with the employer in surrendering a portion of rightful earnings. For this is the only way, practically, in which minimum time wages ever were or ever will be paid.

It has been too rashly assumed that the unfortunate condition of the man who earns but \$14 a week is due to the fact that the trade or the employer puts itself in a false position when it refuses or evades the payment of full wages. Is this true? Does not the man put himself in a false position when he attempts to work at a trade, or a branch of a trade, that he understands most imperfectly? What right has he to the full wages of an expert?

To allude to the incompetency of the average compositor at once provokes the journeyman to this retort: "It is your own fault. If you indentured apprentices, as employers used to, and taught boys their trades, there would be fewer bad workmen." This bold assertion needs examination. It is a begging of the question to assert that an indentured apprentice must be a good or even a fair printer. One must look deeper than this for the source of this trouble. Seventy years ago every printer was, of necessity, a book printer. There were few newspapers that were not attachments to book or job offices. Job work, of course, always existed, but without job type or presses it was but a sorry business. As then practiced, the three branches of the trade were equally familiar to almost all compositors.

Times have changed. Book work is no more the first, but the last on the list. There are more newspaper offices and

newspaper compositors than in the other two branches combined. The value of the product of job offices far exceeds that of the book offices. The three branches are entirely distinct. The boy who is taught the trade in one office, learns the branch there practiced, and no other. The newspaper compositor cannot be an expert book hand; nor can the book hand be a good job printer.

Plain composition is the only work that piece compositors can do with equal facility in all branches. In the newspaper branch this is about all that is required; in the book office it is but a part of the work; in the job office it is not half the work. Further detail is unnecessary. It is obvious that if a man accepts a situation outside of the branch in which he was educated, he works to his own or to his employer's loss. Here is another reason why many men working in book offices earn so little. It is the workman, and not his employer, who is in a false position.

To do work effectively on the newspapers, one of the old rules of the trade had to be abolished. The office had to make up all the matter. The necessity for it was so obvious that it has never been the occasion of dispute. It was, however, the first step in a system that has been the source of endless disputes in book offices. The compositor who learned his trade in a newspaper office had never been taught to make up book pages or to impose forms. The book office has been compelled to do it for him. For the same reason, it has been obliged to reserve the composition of title-pages and neatly-displayed advertisements. To do the work with propriety, as one must do in the face of active competition, it has been found necessary to give this and like work only to experts. The field of the book compositor has consequently been shrinking into narrower limits. As the trade is now practiced, the average book compositor does nothing but set type. Nor is there any reason to believe that he ever will do more. The tendency of work in all trades is to nicer division of labor. There are many reasons why this is to be regretted, both for the interest of employer and employed; but we may be sure that the system will never be changed. One will have to accommodate himself to facts and circumstances that he cannot control.

Unfortunately for the compositor of this class, the part of the trade at which he works is one in which the rudiments are most quickly acquired by the novice. Any intelligent boy or girl can soon learn to set type, not well, it is true, but at such a cheaper rate as to reconcile an employer to the imperfections of the work.

There is probably no one who has a higher estimate than the writer, of the skill, experience and intelligence that are required to constitute a thorough printer. The trade is not to be learned in one year, nor yet always in seven years. But a knowledge of the art of setting type is not a knowledge of the trade. We may, by courtesy or from interest, call the mere type setter a printer, but it does not alter the fact, that the skill or knowledge he has acquired is so slight that the boy or girl of a year's practice can do his work.

There is probably no trade in which boys are such formidable competitors to men as in letter-press printing. No carpenter undertakes to build a house, no machinist constructs machines, not even a tailor or a shoemaker can attempt to carry on business almost exclusively with boys. In all these and other trades the journeymen may think that there is an excess of boys, but they never exist in such proportion as in printing. It is a notorious fact that this city is full of offices in which three-fourths of the work is done by boys. It is equally notorious that the cheaper labor of our country rivals is always that of boys or girls; that a very large proportion, probably more than half, of the plain reprint composition done in this country is done by minors, and done acceptably.

Compositors have always refused to acknowledge the equity of this competition. The fact that the boy can do the man's work is to them quite immaterial. They consider that they have a prescriptive right to consider composition in all its details as men's work exclusively, and thereby entitled to men's full wages. They adhere as rigidly as they can to all the antique usages of the trade when the necessity for them no longer exists; they refuse to see that daily newspapers and steam presses and the art of stereotyping have completely revolutionized the business. They insist on having all the rights and privileges of the old-school book compositor even when they admit they do not possess his qualifications. They refuse



to do any work at less than the full price of the expert workman.

Nevertheless, the work is done. The double-leaded reprints go out of the city to be done by girls, or are kept in the city and are done by two-thirders and by boys. The catalogues and table work, often more profitable than work at single price, that men refuse to do at less than price-and-a-half, or double price, declined by the large offices, go to the smaller ones, and are done by boys at less than single price. The small job work that the large job office has to decline, as not paying the actual cost of men's labor, is also taken up by the smaller ones, and is done by boys. The competitors both of journeymen and of established employers are really boys. It is difficult to say which of the two classes suffers most—the journeymen or the employers. Both of them are not only losing work, but making competitors.

It is of little use for any employer or any journeyman to quarrel with these facts. No amount of denunciation or combination on the part of employers, nor of resolutions by trade unions, nor of apprenticeship laws by legislators, will ever make any change. If it is found that the boy can do more economically the work that has been done by a man, the boy will do it. The buyer of labor can no more be prevented from getting it at the cheaper rate, than the workman can be prevented from buying what he needs in the cheapest market.

It is of as little use to refuse to recognize this state of affairs. This has been the policy of the trade for years, but the time has come when it recognizes us. When the unskilled book compositor and his employer, and the job printer also, are idle half the time, refusing work because it is below the proper rate,—when this refused work is greedily picked up and is done acceptably by boys in and out of the city,—when our mutual refusal to reduce prices seems to have no other effect than that of enabling others to reduce them, and to overstock the trade with boys—it is high time that we comprehend this altered state of affairs. When the work of our offices and our city is slipping away, both to the injury of those who lose and those who take it, it is time that we asked ourselves this question: Are we right in insisting on men's wages for boys' work? Does it benefit ourselves or any one else?



The true source of the troubles of employers about prices, and of compositors about wages, may be found in the persistent attempts of both parties to get men's wages for boys' work. Should it be a matter for wonder, that in trying to reverse the natural laws of trade defeat is as sure as fate?

The correctness of this view of the cause of low wages will be shown quite as clearly by a glance at the condition of those departments of the trade in which men do men's work. One may begin with the morning newspapers. This work is much simpler than any kind of book-work, but it must be done with greater speed, and in unseasonable hours. It requires the expertness that is only acquired after long application, and the endurance and steadiness of a fully developed man. It cannot be done by girls or boys. As managed in this city, it is truly men's work, and accordingly receives men's pay.

In the same offices where book compositors earn less than \$14 a week, are the regular job compositors and time hands, who are paid \$20 a week. There are also often superior workmen who are paid from \$22 to \$25 a week. There are pressmen working in subordinate positions who get \$25 to \$30 a week. There are readers, foremen and managers who are paid from \$25 to \$50 per week; even higher wages have been paid. All these are men of skill. Their right to good wages rests on a solid basis. They do not complain of the competition of boys, for boys cannot do their work. Their wages rise steadily—not by strikes, not by the action of the Union, not always through their own request—often through the recognition of their superior value by the employer, or by the competition of a rival employer for their services. Poorly paid as printing is, there is no trade in which signal ability is better appreciated or encouraged. Over-full as the city is with compositors, there is even now in the dullest season, as there always has been, an unsatisfied demand for skillful workmen. Superior ability always commands steady employment and higher wages. All that the employer asks of the workman is, that he shall furnish him with work that he can sell at a profit. He pays him accordingly.

It is the misfortune of the piece compositor or unskilled workman, that he insists on furnishing the employer with work that can be bought from boys and girls at lower rates,

and that cannot be sold to profit. Unlike the more skillful time-hand, who works in coöperation with his employer, the unskilled workman wrongly considers it to his interest to work independently. His rules about fat and lean, about single and double price, about piece and time work, must be enforced against the city employer, even when he knows that they are disregarded to such an extent by competing offices, that they cannot be enforced on the buyer. The competition of unskilled or of little skilled labor, both at home and abroad, from which the employer suffers as well as the employed, is recognized by the Union only to be made the pretext for apprenticeship laws and higher prices. The inability of the employer, by reason of this competition, to pay higher wages, is made the necessity for eight hours and pay for standing-time.

Are these wise methods of dealing with the evils of the trade? Can any man believe that they will increase the amount of work to be done in the city, or that they will even increase the year's earnings of the average piece compositor? Will they increase the ability of the employer to pay higher wages? Will they not goad him to a retaliation that will make a victory worse than a defeat?

The question will be asked—If these new rules and prices cannot be enforced, how then can the condition of the workman be improved? The remedy is largely in the workman's own hands. It is not in the power of the employer, nor of the Union, to help him out of his difficulties in the speedy manner that he desires. The competition, rural and foreign, from which he suffers was not made by the Union, nor by the city employer; nor can they, nor can the State, abolish it. Quackish remedies, like high prices, or eight hours, or apprenticeship laws, may here and there afford a temporary relief, but they will leave the trade worse than they found it. In spite of all legislation, there is, and always will be, competition. It is to be found in every trade and profession; it is quite as common with merchants as with mechanics. The printer has no right to believe that he should be exempt, or that he can conquer the evil in any other way than by his own individual efforts.

If a man finds himself in a trade overrun with boys and unskilled workmen, who work at cheaper rates, his only remedy is to make himself superior to the boys in skill—to qualify himself to get higher wages. If he desires better prices, he must sell a better quality of labor. It commands a better price, and he can get it if he will but try to deserve it. But it is something he must do for himself: no trade-union can do it for him. For the associated efforts of trade-unions, or of coöperative societies, are of little value unless they are based on individual ability. The reform that the workman desires in the trade must begin with himself.

To the so-called modern positive philosopher, who sneers at the maxims of Ben Franklin, and who subscribes to the doctrines of Proudhon, the suggestion of personal effort may probably be as distasteful as the practice. But there are young Americans in this city, who have not yet outgrown respect for New England teachings, who may listen with better grace to the words of one of her most able sons,\* with whose counsels this essay will find a fitting close, and, it is hoped, the fullest concurrence of the reader.

It is not yet given us to see how this great result is to come about, but we can rest assured that it will not come about through any bombardment of rhetorical epigrams, nor yet through the noisy resolutions of strikes; it will not come to us through political action, nor yet through the passage of multitudinous laws intended to regulate the hours of human toil, or the value of human labor, or the demand for wealth; all these are but the barren product of that spirit of political tampering which has been described as the odious vice of restless and unstable minds.

Not our generation, nor many succeeding ones, will see the millenium created by an act of Legislature, and ushered into being by the club of a constable. Far otherwise; the industrial and social reorganization essential to our future, like all far-reaching social movements, can only result from the combined and quiet action of an intelligent and determined people, attending in their own way to their daily work, and coldly disregarding all short cuts and royal roads to their promised land. It must be the result of the deep ground-swell of a steady purpose, and will never originate in the frothy eddies of an idle rhetoric.

Germany has already taught us one lesson; England is teaching us another. Both lessons come to us as the still, small voice of reason and hope, making itself heard amid the noisy and profitless tumult of passion.

\* Charles Francis Adams, Jr. Oration in Boston, July 4, 1872.



In those countries, a few among the owners of labor have at last learned to coöperate, as well as to combine. Are, then, the laborers of Germany and of Great Britain—those whom we so constantly refer to in our vile political jargon as “the pauper labor of Europe”—are they more intelligent or determined than those of Massachusetts? Few at least here would care to maintain it. Are they better endowed with means with which to further their experiments? I cannot say; but with \$160,000,000 of wealth hoarded in the savings banks of the Commonwealth, our people should have a sufficiency of capital. Yet the intelligent, self-reliant, determined children of Massachusetts hang backward in this great work, while others in less fortunate lands press to the front. Nevertheless, the work will yet be accomplished, and what the savings bank now is to the laboring class of Massachusetts, that and much more will the mill and the workshop be in the future. Here, and here alone, lies the solution of the problem; therein is the ark of salvation.

An immutable law, wiser than any recorded upon human statute book, has decreed that every people may in course of time regulate its own destiny. No human power external to themselves can assist them greatly, and none can permanently retard them. To each community there ultimately comes, through government or notwithstanding government, such an industrial and social system as they themselves shall make. The future of Massachusetts rests in the hands of the mass of her citizens, who now crowd together in towns, as their fathers lived apart in the country. It is for them to decide, for her and for themselves, whether they will hereafter be dependents at the doors of corporations, and suppliants at the bar of the Legislature, or whether they will stand up in the honest dignity of independent manhood, and emancipate themselves. Capital is selfish and hard; indeed, if it cease to be so, it would not long exist. It does not deal in sentiment; by the law of its being, against which it is childish to disclaim, it buys where it can buy for least, and sells where it can sell for most; skill and muscle are but one portion of its raw material, as coal and cotton are another. It can be effectively approached in one way, and in only one. To deal successfully with it, labor has yet to prove one essential vital postulate—it must demonstrate that labor is more profitable to capital as a partner than as an employé. In these few words rests the whole issue of this great debate; but this it can never do till it tries and fails, and fails and tries again; for nothing here will succeed but success. One great, coöperative triumph, the result of its own unassisted capital and its own directing brain, would thus outweigh, to the labor of Massachusetts, the results of a thousand successful strikes.

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